

IV. THE GOLDEN AGE

Expanding horizons, shrinking the world

It may come as a surprise for many to think of the era 1940-1956 as the Golden Age of art music recording. After all, throughout most of this period the primary sound carrier was still the 78-rpm record with all its limitations, not least of which was a narrow bandwidth and attendant surface noise, to say nothing of its short playing time and a breakability factor which became even worse after World War II. Yet from a musical standpoint, there was so much going on, most of it captured on discs for posterity, that one could have realistically lived their entire musical lives during this period and been extremely happy. At the beginning of this period, for instance, one could still hear the great idiosyncratic classical performers of the previous era, in person, on radio and/or on records, among them Mengelberg, Huberman, Schnabel, Kreisler, Furtwängler, Cortot and Thibaud; the great modern-style innovators such as Kipnis, McCormack, Schiøtz, Menuhin, Heifetz, Feuermann, Toscanini, Fritz Reiner, Szigeti, Gieseking and Rubinstein; and, at the other end of the era, such startlingly innovative musicians as Glenn Gould, Guido Cantelli, Maria Callas, Tito Gobbi, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Claudio Arrau, Gyorgy Cziffra, Dmitri Mitropoulos, Robert Craft, Dinu Lipatti, David Oistrakh, Charles Munch, Noah Greenberg and Ginette Neveu. Somewhere or other in the world, you could hear Igor Stravinsky, Darius Milhaud, Richard Strauss, Francis Poulenc or Benjamin Britten performing their own music.

As for the jazz and folk worlds, they were even more historical and exciting. You could hear Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, Cisco Houston, the Weavers and other pioneers playing and singing their music. At the early end of this era, if you were lucky, you might even have been able to hear authentic New Orleans jazz played by the very people who created it: Sidney Bechet, Jimmie Noone, Jelly Roll Morton, Bunk Johnson and Baby Dodds. You could hear boogie-woogie played not only by some of its innovators, Meade Lux Lewis, Jimmy Yancey and Albert Ammons, but also by classical crossover artists like José Iturbi. You could hear the greatest of the jazz innovators of the 1920s as living artists rather than just as names on a record label. You could hear the finest white and black musicians jamming on the air, in movies and on records, either in small groups or within the various great big bands which had evolved from the styles of Art Hickman and Fletcher Henderson. And, were you modern-minded, you could hear the embryonic forms of new jazz played by Charlie Christian, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Mingus, Fats Navarro, Errol Garner or Lennie Tristano. At the further end of this era, you could also hear such innovators as J.J. Johnson, Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis, Gerry Mulligan, Shorty Rogers or the Modern Jazz Quartet.

And if you didn't like what the major labels were recording, you could start your own label—and, somehow or other, find a “marketing niche.”

It seldom happens that the exact center of a century produces some of its finest music, and in this case the surprise was compounded by the fact that crass commercialism often conflicted with art, and that war conflicted with both. Yet this was exactly the period of time that was most exciting and more diverse musically than any other, and so many of the performers of this music were alive, active, and eager for a wider audience. Yes, there was still a class divide when it came to classical vs. jazz, but that divide was slowly eroding by the end of this period. The fellaheen and the upper crust met and merged in the waters of a media explosion the likes of which the world would not experience again until the period 1990-2004; and this time, society and culture cooperated with art and commerce to cause a proliferation and cross-pollination of styles unparalleled in human history.

Up until this point, I have only mentioned sociological changes peripherally as they were mirrored in the popular and classical music expressions of their time, but from this point on sociology will become increasingly more important to our principal discussion. For art music has always been a fundamental part of any culture's growth and evolution, even when it was initially conceived for the enjoyment and at times exclusive property of a certain class. I say this not only in regards to classical music, which evolved during the 20th century from an art form reserved for the rich to a portion of media culture accessible to all, back again to the province of the wealthy, but also in regards to folk music and jazz. In previous centuries, folk music (jazz not having existed prior to the 1890s) was always an underlying principle of art music, but with the exception of the remarkable Swedish folk singer and composer Carl Bellman in the late 18th century, it only graduated up the ladder of class via the enthusiastic interest of classical composers who—remember—were initially the servants of the rich, the same as their cooks and nannies. We who tend to idolize and confer a sort of godly quality to composers tend to forget that most of them led lives of “pretend elegance” in the courts of the titled and wealthy. Like Rigoletto in the court of the Duke of Mantua, they were associated by those outside their sphere of influence as being part of that world, but in actual fact they were only performing monkeys, often ill-paid and bound to contracts that made them little more than indentured servants. In England, Handel and Haydn were able to finagle their way into positions of power where their fecund imaginations were well-paid, but they were the exceptions to the rule. Even such phenomenal geniuses as J.S. and C.P.E. Bach, Johann Hasse, Diedrich Buxtehude, Antonio Vivaldi, Wolfgang Mozart, Christoph Willibald Gluck, Gasparo Spontini and Franz Schubert spent most or all of their lives as glorified entertainers. Ludwig van Beethoven, the man credited with breaking the “patronage system,” paid a heavy price for his independence. Not being in servitude to the wealthy also meant that he was not privy to their inner circle. He could give concerts of his music that they would attend, he could even teach piano to their daughters and nieces, but if he even thought he was on their level he was laughed at and ridiculed; and, after his death, his services “no longer required,” he was as quickly forgotten by the shallow minds that had employed and enjoyed him.

The mid-20th century was in some ways different, in some ways not so different. By this time, the royalty worldwide was pretty much a thing of the past except as tradition, of setting up figurehead kings, queens and princes that people could admire but not have to obey. Two centuries of war, including the two World Wars triggered primarily by Germany, had further come to splinter political, national and cultural alliances to the point where all ideas were pretty much the province of the world. One could, for the first time in history, pick and choose one's ideology, religion and lifestyle the same as one's occupation or place of residence. A feeling of egalitarianism was entering the world stage, with the stubborn exception of the Soviet Union and China where institutional Communism dominated and controlled both its population and environment. It was a feeling that would expand and grow until the early 1970s, then explode in a series of political and cultural upheavals that would forever change the face of the globe. Without getting too far of ourselves, global Capitalism became a deeply-rooted institution, a fast-growing lifestyle choice and a cultural force that eventually supplanted those of philosophy, poetry, music and dance. Mankind learned to express itself through the very mechanical-industrial forces that had been shunned, feared or ridiculed by artists as varied in expression as Gustav Mahler (the Sixth Symphony), Fritz Lang (“Metropolis”), George Antheil (“Ballet Mecanique”), Charlie Chaplin (“Modern Times”) and even popular cartoons of the late 1930s-early '40s.

Consider these facts, for instance, regarding the rather complex Toscanini-RCA relationship: RCA gave Toscanini the latitude to perform the music he loved when he wanted to,

no questions asked, no restrictions as to programming. They also gave him the right to refuse musicians in or guest conductors of his orchestra, and final right of approval and refusal to the issuing of any of his recordings. But they also took away his right to *choose* musicians or conductors for the NBC Symphony, his right to negotiate when and how his records would be issued, his control over the “tweaked” sound of his records, or how he would be marketed. And, in those instances when Toscanini asserted his authority and tried to step in and have things his way, they would send the test pressings to his son Walter who became increasingly more potent as a decision-maker as his father became older and less willing or able to exercise his control. During the last four years of his NBC contract, in fact, Toscanini was basically a puppet on RCA’s string. What had begun as a partnership of giants—one industrial, one musical—ended up as most such satanic alliances do, with the industry prevailing over the artist. And if they could do this to a Toscanini, who had extraordinary artistic credentials and phenomenal clout, they could (and did) do far worse to those with lesser influence.

Toscanini began to realize he was duped in the winter of 1940-41, when he gave a pair of concerts in Carnegie Hall (his beloved Studio 8-H was being renovated at the time), one of Beethoven’s “Missa Solemnis” and the other of Verdi’s “Requiem.” Wanting everything to be perfect as usual, Toscanini scheduled long rehearsals that cut into the evening hours of the musicians. What he didn’t realize was that, though this particular group of musicians known as the “NBC Symphony” were under contract to play for him, they were also under contract to play for a variety of mundane radio shows over the NBC Blue and Red networks; and so, as the clock dragged on towards 6 p.m. and Toscanini was still fretting over details in Beethoven or Verdi, the musicians were wondering how on earth they could make it to their next radio show. They eventually decided to stop playing, one by one, get down on their hands and knees and literally crawl out of the hall, counting on Toscanini’s increasingly nearsightedness not to discover them. But one of the musicians dropped something, Toscanini discovered him, and suddenly realized what was going on. Peering to the back of the hall, he caught the shadowy figure of NBC executive Samuel Chotzinoff, screamed his name, and the next week stormed the RCA office of David Sarnoff threatening to resign from the orchestra. No problem, Sarnoff said. Just put your resignation in writing, we’ll accept it and replace you with Stokowski.

If there was one name that was sure to rouse Toscanini’s ire, it was Stokowski. Of all the conductors he disliked, Stokowski was his particular *bête noir*. (He once described him to critic B.H. Haggin as “that ‘orrible man and *dishonest* musician!”) Toscanini muttered something about having to think it over. Sarnoff offered a compromise: Toscanini would relinquish his sole directorship of the NBC Symphony for two seasons and do a podium exchange with Stokowski at the Philadelphia Orchestra. Toscanini may have disliked Stokowski, but he admired the orchestra he had built there, so he agreed. Over the next two years Toscanini conducted both orchestras and made a series of outstanding recordings with Philadelphia, which by the 1941-42 season had a new music director in Eugene Ormandy. But the masters that recording director Charles O’Connell used to preserve these performances on were made of shoddy wartime shellac; the sound was cramped and congested, and the pressings were a nightmare of ticks, pops and crackle. When Toscanini heard the results, he was furious. Once again he stormed Sarnoff’s office, screaming that he had sweated blood over these performances. O’Connell was fired, but there was no chance to remake the recordings because, by this time, the orchestra had been signed away from RCA by Columbia, and RCA had no interest in promoting a rival label’s orchestra. Toscanini eventually remade all of the Philadelphia material with the NBC Symphony, but the experience left a bad taste in his mouth.

Meanwhile, back in England, HMV was recording and promoting Sir Thomas Beecham with the same fervor RCA reserved for Toscanini. There was a series of Mozart symphonies, another of the music of Jean Sibelius, as well as various other fare both symphonic and operatic. Beecham, like Stokowski, was a master builder of orchestras but a phlegmatic musician: some of his performances were superb, many were quirky, but he had an almost legendary status with the British public, having been a part of their musical life since at least 1915.

After the war, however, both Beecham and Walter Legge managed to procure the best of Britain's orchestral musicians for two "created" orchestras, the Royal Philharmonic and the Philharmonia of London. By raiding the London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony and holding auditions, they managed to obtain the very finest players for their two orchestras, Beecham's designed primarily for live concerts and recordings on the side, Legge's primarily for recordings with concerts on the side. By doing so, they depleted the previously-existing groups to the point where they became mere shells of their former selves, but record buyers were treated to some of the best music available via their recorded legacy.

Among the musicians most highly coveted by both groups was a remarkable young horn player, Dennis Brain, who revolutionized his instrument in much the same way that Heifetz had the violin and Feuermann the cello. Dennis' father was Aubrey Brain, a mainstay of the London Philharmonic for years and an occasional soloist whose contribution to the 1933 recording of the Brahms Horn Trio was well-recognized, while his uncle Alfred was a fiery if technically limited player best known for his years in the Seattle Symphony under former conducting lion Albert Coates. Dennis' technique was excellent, allowing him to play passages easily that other horn players struggled with, but it was his particularly poetic way with a phrase that made him a legend. In the closing years of the war he had recorded Richard Strauss' first horn concerto and the Beethoven Horn Sonata, performances that put him at the forefront of his generation; but unlike Feuermann, who struggled to escape the shadow of Pablo Casals, Brain had no such long shadow to overcome. His father and uncle were very fine horn players but not really in his league. After the war, Legge made a recording of Brain playing the Mozart Horn Concerto No. 2 with Walter Susskind and the newly-formed Philharmonia, a performance that quickly encircled the globe, despite the fact that Dennis made a mistake in one movement. Thirty years later, aspiring horn players were copying his phrasing note-for-note, including the mistake!

Brain came to America in 1946 as part of a tour with the Royal Philharmonic. As soon as he hit New York, he made a beeline to hear his favorite brass player in person. It wasn't Arthur Berv of the NBC Symphony or Mason Jones of the Philadelphia Orchestra, two excellent horn-players who one might have thought would elicit his interest, but trombonist Tommy Dorsey. It turned out that he had been a fan of Dorsey's playing since he was a teenager. Remembering that Dorsey had himself been inspired in his phrasing by the recorded performances of Fritz Kreisler, it is interesting to speculate this peculiar lineage that descended from string player to trombonist to hornist, and all via the medium of recordings.

After the war, too, Legge took an exceptional interest in promoting the career of Herbert von Karajan, the youngest of a remarkable generation of German conductors that had produced Karl Böhm, Clemens Krauss, Fritz Busch, Carl Schuricht and Josef Krips. Faced with such stiff competition, Karajan found it difficult to forge a career, even in Nazi Germany when anyone German who kow-towed to the Third Reich could obtain performances. Karajan admitted that he had conducted in a Nazi uniform in order to gain podium experience, not because he believed in their politics. Since he was proved by the post-war tribunal not to have been politically active in the Nazi Party, his record was considered relatively "clean," which gave Legge the leverage to promote him in both England and America. This, however,

infuriated the older Wilhelm Furtwängler who had conducted far more performances for the Nazis than Karajan but was also apolitical, and it drove a wedge between Furtwängler and Legge that was not resolved up to the point of the conductor's death in 1954.

There were also some exceptional talents emerging from war-torn Europe that caught the ear of the media-savvy Legge. Among the two finest were French violinist Ginette Neveu, whose passionate playing literally set the classical world on fire, and Rumanian pianist Dinu Lipatti, who had been around since before the war but whose career, like so many others, was stunted by the conflict. Both made some exceptional, pace-setting records for EMI, especially Lipatti who, like Schnabel before him, was seen as a new type of pianist, one whose fire and passion were tempered by some of the most musical phrasing imaginable. And both died young, Neveu in a plane crash in 1949, Lipatti of leukemia in 1950. Yet, like Dennis Brain, their remarkable legacy continued to inspire following generations of musicians; and it may even be said that their early deaths, like the early deaths of Caruso and Feuermann, actually helped them achieve a legendary status that their musical talents alone may not have garnered them. The record world was learning that great talent plus an early demise equaled fabulous cash profits for the record company.

RCA had a similar firebrand in its ranks, the young American pianist William Kapell. In his time, Kapell was recognized as a *wunderkind* whose astounding technique was matched by a fire in his playing that few could muster, but there were critical reservations about some of his interpretations. But, voila, Kapell too died in a plane crash in 1953, and since then his stature and legend grew by leaps and bounds.

The duality of Lipatti and Kapell provide fascinating glimpses into the future of pianistic art and art music in general. Both were child wonders who came to prominence by the age of twenty, but both of their careers were stunted during the war years: those are their only points of similarity. Lipatti, steeped in old-world traditions, played with suavity and elegance. His playing had a tremendous linear quality, each note being part of an overall legato flow, and in his meticulous attention to details of the score he, like McCormack, Szigeti, Schiøtz and Schnabel, was rather modern in feeling. Kapell, by contrast, was an impetuous, fiery virtuoso; he believed in carrying on the traditions of the past, not only questionable ones like Horowitz (whom he considered the greatest pianist who ever lived) but also highly artistic ones like Cortot and Ignaz Friedman. This may eventually have led to his being rejected by audiences and critics of his time, whereas even at his last recital Lipatti was worshipped as a god. But neither recorded very much, though what they left us has colored all subsequent performances of that music: in Lipatti's case the Chopin Barcarolle and Waltzes, the Schumann and Grieg piano concerti, in Kapell's case pieces by Liszt (particularly the "Mephisto Waltz" which has not been surpassed since it was recorded in 1945), Chopin's Sonata No. 3 and the concerti of Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff. We were exactly at mid-century when these remarkable phenomena made their artistic mark, but their shadows were long.

Also during this period, two superb African-American singers had divergent influences on the emerging world scene, contralto Marian Anderson and bass Paul Robeson. Both were extraordinarily gifted singers who had fought color prejudice in order to rise to prominence, but Anderson was solely a classical concert artist who kept her personal feelings very much to herself while Robeson sang a great many folk songs and popular music (he had starred in Kern's musical "Show Boat," both onstage and in the 1935 film version) who was politically outspoken. Those who did not like Robeson's left-leaning politics, however, could still admire his singing on records, while to many people the world over records were as close as they would ever get to Marian Anderson.

For the first time since the 1920s, great jazz and classical performances were indelibly captured on film. In the jazz sphere, many of these came from a curious source: “Soundies,” two-minute film shorts made to be shown on “video juke boxes” in bars and restaurants. The Soundie concept was ingenious but somewhat expensive. The performances, usually running three minutes or less, were captured on 16mm film, but the soundtracks were usually recorded separately, making these the first performances in which the musical performance was synchronized with a pre-existing video performance. Eight soundies featuring various performers were spliced together on a reel which ran in a continuous loop, and were projected onto a screen by means of mirrors contained within the playback machine, called a Panoram; it was later used as the basis of RCA’s 16mm film projector. Soundies were produced by such companies as Minoco and RCM Productions, a company formed by James Roosevelt (the son of Franklin D. Roosevelt), songwriter Sam Coslow and Herbert Mills, a pioneer in developing arcade music machines.

In order to achieve the widest possible distribution, soundies covered the gamut of musical styles from country and western to Russian balalaika music, tenors singing Irish folksongs, the big band swing music of Will Bradley and Tommy Dorsey and jazz greats Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Stan Kenton and Nat King Cole. Included in the collection at the UCLA Film and Television Archive are Spike Jones and his City Slickers, Thelma White and her All Girl Orchestra, and Fats Waller. A soundie reel sometimes included cheesecake segments—striptease, burlesque routines or shots of women in bathing suits—intended to attract wartime military personnel on leave. Appeals for war bonds and other patriotic messages (“We’re All Americans,” “When Hitler Kicks the Bucket,” “The White Cliffs of Dover,”) were included. Soundies often starred little known performers who later became famous, such as Alan Ladd, Cyd Charisse, Doris Day and Ricardo Montalban, as well as performers on their way down. Many African-American performers like Dorothy Dandridge, Louis Armstrong and Stepin Fetchit, largely absent from mainstream films except in minor roles, were also featured, as were such eccentric jazz performers as Harry “The Hipster” Gibson, a white stride pianist and jazz singer who took Waller’s approach into the modern jazz era.

Jazz and classical musicians were also finding their way into mainstream films, at least in featured segments if not as stars of the productions. There is a remarkable short of the great tenor saxist Lester Young, made in typical film noir style, and such artists as pianist Art Tatum occasionally found their way into mainstream films of the time. Soprano Kirsten Flagstad was featured in “The Big Broadcast of 1938,” violinist Jascha Heifetz made it into “Carnegie Hall,” bass Ezio Pinza was in “Tonight We Sing,” and the Office of War Information (OWI) made the first-ever film footage of Toscanini conducting in 1943.

Of course, a certain number of classical singers—following in Tibbett’s footsteps and not as restricted by new Metropolitan Opera manager Edward Johnson as they had been by



Gatti-Casazza—went into movies during the 1930s and '40s. The first were popular radio soprano Jeanette MacDonald who, with no Met contract to concern her, became an immediate hit with her big smile and vivacious charm, and classical baritone Nelson Eddy, who had sung in some important productions in his native Philadelphia. Eddy, though handsome, did not have the screen charm of MacDonald, but he “tested” well with female audiences and so became a major star. For years he appeared in major Hollywood films, some of them with MacDonald, but eventually left when he tired of the business and wanted to resume a concert career. Far from ruining his reputation, Eddy’s movie career helped boost ticket sales for his more serious fare.

Star mezzo-soprano Risë Stevens also made the jump to Hollywood—she is best-known for her leading role in “The Chocolate Soldier” and her supporting role in the hit Bing Crosby film “Going My Way”—but quickly left, finding the atmosphere even more stultifying and artificial than that of grand opera. And in 1945 the Great Dane himself, heldentenor Lauritz Melchior, literally burst on the film scene with cameo roles in various films. Melchior was nearing sixty, was overweight and by no means handsome, but his jovial manners and quick wit made him a favorite with movie audiences. To his credit, some of the pieces he sang in his films were legitimate arias, well-conducted and presented complete and unabridged, quite an accomplishment for that period.

Yet it was when Ezio Pinza went to Hollywood that art met commerce in an extraordinary way. Perhaps it was because he was so very handsome, or perhaps his Casanova-like offstage reputation actually helped enhance his image, but though he, too was in his fifties, he became a huge media star, first through the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical “South Pacific” and then through the 1952 film “Tonight We Sing” in which he played none other than Feodor Chaliapin. His detractors were ready to tear him to ribbons for this impersonation, but much to their surprise he carried it off brilliantly, not only emulating Chaliapin’s offstage mannerisms but cleverly recreating at least some of the great Russian’s onstage wizardry. Of course, he had some help, since he had performed Pimen opposite Chaliapin’s Boris Godunov at the Met in the 1920s, and so had a chance to study Chaliapin’s performing methods close-up and personal. Nevertheless, “Tonight We Sing” remains a high water-mark among opera singers’ performances on film.

Columbia expands their colors!



Whereas RCA Victor really only had three color labels—dark blue with silver for Blue-bird, black with gold print for regular pop music and red with gold lettering on Red Seal—rival Columbia chose to diversify their catalog with several different colors. Black, once used in the early 1920s as their regular pop label, was now used for artists who recorded popular material but were more classical in orientation, such as bass Paul Robeson. Green, the color Columbia used in the late 1920s for their pop records, was now adapted to what would later be termed “contemporary pops”—music by living American songwriters whose music had the form of pop music but the “dressing” of classical, such

as Morton Gould and André Kostelanetz. Then, of course, there was blue for “regular” Masterworks recordings and red for “regular” pop music.

RCA, hedging their bets, did not introduce any new label colors until 1946, the year after World War II ended. At that time they introduced their “Heritage Series” label, classic acoustic vocal recordings from the “golden age” of singing by such artists as Caruso, Frieda Hempel, Marcel Journet, Mattia Battistini, John McCormack and others. This label was exactly the opposite of their regular Red Seal discs: a distinctive gold background with dark red lettering. More interestingly, the records were pressed not on shellac but on transparent red vinyl, thus eliminating much of the surface noise inherent in the older discs and giving the buyer a virtually permanent record. Why the record companies did not simply switch to vinyl for 78s, then or earlier, remains a mystery, though expense was probably a factor. In addition, the Heritage Series 78s were issued in sleeves that were overlaid with real gold foil, embossed with red lettering. This was an incredible venture for such a conservative label, but apparently the market for old vocal recordings was not yet a good one, for the Heritage Series disappeared by 1948.

Jazz changes

Just as we can, strangely enough, date the beginning of the Swing Era to a particular date, we can also date the beginning of jazz’s changes to at least a particular year; and again, the catalyst was Benny Goodman. Having recently been forced to remake his band after the defections of Harry James and Gene Krupa, Goodman, suffering from sciatica, took a few months off for an operation and recuperation. When he returned in late 1940, it was with a new band and a new attitude. Wanting to integrate his dual interests of jazz and classical music, he hired one of the most brilliant arrangers in all of jazz, Eddie Sauter. Sauter had come to prominence writing some of the subtlest and most intriguing of all swing arrangements for Red Norvo’s ill-fated, Chicago-based big band. Now that Norvo had disbanded, he was a free agent, and Goodman hired him to write a batch of innovative scores for his orchestra. Though Sauter never created a “warm” sound world, as did Ellington and Glenn Miller, his unusual reed and brass mixtures were virtually a new dialect in music, an entirely new way of hearing and blending instruments that created a sensation that was eventually to influence both jazz and classical music. One of his first pieces for the Goodman band was “Benny Rides Again,” an ingenious mixture of pungent, bluesy statements by growl trumpeter Cootie Williams against a surging sax section and pounding tom-toms, and a lyrical classical section based on Borodin’s “Polovtsian Dances.” It created a sensation, which led to further experiments such as “Coconut Grove,” “More Than You Know,” “Superman,” “Moonlight on the Ganges” and “When the Sun Comes Out.” Then, in 1941, Goodman hired pianist-arranger Mel Powell, whose “cool” playing and ingenious arrangements gave the band another dimension. The Sauter and Powell arrangements were not particularly popular, which led Goodman to downplay them in his public appearances and eventually revert to the Henderson-Sampson style which had given him his first and greatest successes; but all of them were recorded and issued by Columbia, and they were to have a profound effect on the future of jazz.

One such band to follow in Goodman’s new footsteps was that of pianist Claude Thornhill, formed in 1941. Thornhill, who delighted in subtle sounds, created a sound-world all his own in such works as “Snowfall” (which became his theme song) and “Portrait of a Guinea Farm.” He eventually hired a gifted and creative arranger from Canada, Gil Evans, who would add some of the most innovative and creative arrangements of all time to the band’s book.

Other new-styled swing bands emerged during the war years: one led by baritone saxist Boyd Raeburn, whose stable of great arrangers—among them Budd Johnson, Eddie Finckel, George Handy and Johnny Richards—combined the sound-world of Igor Stravinsky with the rhythmic and linear jazz concepts of Lester Young, and another by clarinetist Woody Herman. Raeburn's band was never really popular, recording only 34 sides for three different independent labels (Guild, Jewell and Atlantic), but Herman, with a brand-new contract from Columbia records and a radio spot sponsored by Wildroot hair products, became a national sensation. Spearheaded by an incendiary trumpet section that included Pete and Conte Candoli and Sonny Berman and a rhythm section that included bassist Chubby Jackson and veteran Chicago drummer Dave Tough, the "Herman Herd" (as it was dubbed by *Metronome* magazine) recorded a string of brilliant instrumentals for Columbia one of which, "Bijou"—subtitled "Rhumba à la Jazz"—caught the ear of Stravinsky himself, who loved its repetitive, eccentric riffs and overall musical concept, including a brilliant trombone solo by Les Burns.

Yet it was an alto saxist from Jay McShann's Kansas City band and a renegade trumpeter who split time with Teddy Hill, Cab Calloway and Billy Eckstine (though he also wrote a few charts for Woody Herman) who would completely alter the history of jazz. Charlie Parker and John "Dizzy" Gillespie were the twin dynamos of a new style that would come to be known as "bebop." Bebop was a fast-paced form of jazz meant for listening, not dancing; it featured a stiffish beat against which the musicians played frantic, note-filled solos in which they extended the harmonic structure beyond the conventional fourths, fifths and sevenths to ninths, elevenths and thirteenth. Curiously enough, many of the new bop pieces were based on older tunes such as "Whispering," "Crazy Rhythm" and "How High the Moon," but so transformed by the new chord extensions that they became different compositions. Most of the experimentation took place in after-hours clubs such as Minton's Playhouse in New York, a jazz club run by former bandleader Teddy Hill. There, Parker and Gillespie were joined by such like-minded musicians as guitarist Charlie Christian, pianist Ken Kersey and drummer Kenny Clarke; but since it was only recorded on private acetate discs, none of it reached the public consciousness until it was fully-formed, around 1945, and then initially on one of the new small labels which had sprung up (more on that to follow).

Another major player in the new jazz revolution was a bandleader from Balboa Beach, California, pianist-composer Stan Kenton. Like the beboppers, Kenton worked against a stiffish rhythm; unlike them, his music was a form of overly-loud big-band jazz. Eventually, the Kenton style would become an anachronism in jazz, whereas bebop developed and changed form, but during the 1940s and early 1950s it was yet another way of taking jazz out of the dance halls and into the concert hall, and for that alone Kenton deserves a niche in the history of the music. He may have been misguided at times, but his heart was in the right place; he saw jazz as a viable form of art and not just something for dancing and drinking.

New jazz labels erupt

By the late 1930s, RCA, Decca, Columbia and their various subsidiary labels (Bluebird, Odeon, OKeh) dominated the commercial music scene, which in those days also encompassed the swing and jazz fields. All the most *famous* artists were locked up to those labels, including such geniuses as Armstrong, Hines, Bechet, Tatum, Ellington and Hampton. But there was a growing dissatisfaction among true jazz-lovers that the essence of the music, the creators who were still alive and the brilliant innovators who were not considered "commercial" by the big labels, were being ignored or under-recorded. Thus, at the very height (or depth) of the Depression, several independent entrepreneurs put their money where their

mouth was, recording and marketing small-group jazz at a time when big-band Swing was still King.

Among the very first was Commodore records, an offshoot of a famous New York record store founded by Milt Gabler. Gabler, born in 1911 in Harlem, got his start in the record business through working at his family's radio store. By the mid-1930s, the Commodore Music Shop on East 42nd Street had become, in the words of critic George Frazier, “a wondrously cluttered hole-in-the-wall where you would go at lunchtime or after work to hear tu-



multuous talk and brave new music.” By 1938, Gabler was unhappy with the quality and quantity of “real jazz” being issued by the major labels, so he started his own. At first he specialized in reissuing rare older recordings originally distributed by now-defunct independents like Gennett, but eventually he started supervising new recording sessions of his own.

Among the first artists he brought to the label were tenor saxophonist Lester Young, singer Billie Holiday and the nearly-forgotten trombone great Miff Mole—an eclectic group representing both the roots and the future of the music. Eventually he would sign such artists as Wild Bill Davison, Pee Wee Russell, Eddie Heywood, Art Tatum, Edmond Hall and Coleman Hawkins. The records sold well enough to keep the label solvent, but not enough to make Gabler financially independent; and so, by 1944, he was hired by Decca to produce their jazz and jazz-pop crossover records. Again, one of the first artists signed to Decca under Gabler was Billie Holiday, and it was during her Decca years that the chanteuse finally became a pop as well as a jazz legend.

Another label that started in the late 1930s was Blue Note. Founded by two German-born jazz enthusiasts, Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff, Blue Note was dedicated to presenting the very best in jazz. During their early years they managed something of a *coup* by signing Sidney Bechet at approximately the same time he was still making his “New Orleans Feet-warmers” sides for RCA, but they also signed the brilliant boogie-woogie pianist Meade Lux Lewis, Chicago jazz pianist Art Hodes, clarinetist Edmond Hall, vibist Red Norvo and, for one notable session, Benny Goodman’s star guitarist Charlie Christian.

After the war, Blue Note continued to record some of the great traditional jazz artists like Bechet, James P. Johnson and Wild Bill Davison, but they also began to expand their horizons into the realm of modern jazz. They were the first label to record such jazz giants as trumpeter Fats Navarro and pianist Thelonious Monk, whose music was generally incomprehensible to the general public. As time went on, Blue Note would also record such giants of

the music as bandleader-drummer Art Blakey, jazz organist Jimmy Smith, guitarist Wes Montgomery and trumpeter Miles Davis. They are one of the very few independent jazz labels to survive into the modern era, and the only one to never change their basic label design from the beginning to the present.

At about the same time that Commodore and Blue Note were presenting alternative forms of jazz, a new major label was formed. This was Capitol Records, formed in 1942 by songwriter Johnny Mercer, Hollywood record-store owner Glenn Wallichs and songwriter-movie producer Buddy DeSylva. According to Stephen Frattallone's 60th anniversary tribute article, "Like Mercer's musical genius, Capitol Records was new, fresh and revolutionary. He wanted to form a record company where music that was recorded and the artists who recorded it were treated differently. He wanted to give new artists and veteran artists alike the freedom to grow and to expand their artistic palette. Capitol Records provided a competitive alternative to the three major record companies of the day—Victor, Columbia and Decca—all established in New York. With his new record company, Mercer helped to change the sound of American pop music and the way it was made...It was agreed upon that Wallichs would run the business while Mercer would find the artists and supervise their artistic output. All that was needed to set Capitol Records into motion was financial backing. Mercer looked to Buddy DeSylva, who, besides being a great songwriter in his own right, had become head of production at Paramount Studios. He had hired Mercer to do the score with Victor Schertzinger for *The Fleet's In*, a musical with William Holden, Dorothy Lamour, Eddie Bracken and Betty Hutton. DeSylva was also excited about Mercer's new project and quickly wrote him out a check for \$25,000. Capitol Records was now in business."

Mercer's old boss, bandleader Paul Whiteman, was the first artist to record for Capitol; but unlike his anachronistic 1934-37 Victor recordings, this Whiteman session was forward-



looking. The very first Capitol record was Whiteman's band playing a jumping instrumental by black arranger Jimmy Mundy, "The General Jumped at Dawn," paired with an extremely tasteful pop arrangement of "Trav'lin Light." The former side featured an extraordinary jazz pianist named Buddy Weed; the latter featured a gorgeous solo by trombonist Skip Layton and a vocal by "Lady Day"—none other than Billie Holiday. The record put both Capitol Records and Billie Holiday firmly in the pop spotlight. In the beginning, and for several years thereafter, Capitol used the C.P. MacGregor Studios to make their records. The label's first million-seller was "Cow Cow Boogie" by singer Ella Mae Morse, but in 1943 Capitol scored a twin coup by signing two of the great jazz giants of the 1940s, Stan Kenton and pianist-singer Nat "King" Cole, whose trio became a sensation in the early post-war years.



Three other independent jazz labels that would have a major impact on the preservation and future of jazz were Savoy, Dial and Musicraft. Savoy was formed in Newark, New Jersey in 1942 by Herman Lubinsky and Ozzie Cadena. African-American artists never liked Lubinsky, who they believed grossly underpaid them for their work. Tiny Price, a journalist for the black newspaper *The Newark Herald News* said of Savoy and Lubinsky:

There's no doubt everybody hated Herman Lubinsky. If he messed with you, you were messed. At the same time, some of those people—many of them Newark's top singers and musicians—would never have been exposed to records if he didn't do what he did. Except for Lubinsky, all the hot little numbers, like Buddy Johnson's 'Cherry' would have been lost. The man may have been hated, but he saved a lot of our history—for us and for future generations.

The story was quite different for Dial and Musicraft. The former was initiated by jazz critic (and former detective-story writer) Ross Russell, who loved the new music passionately and cared deeply for his artists. Because of the way Russell treated his artists, Charlie Parker and trumpeter Miles Davis eagerly jumped from Savoy to Dial



when the latter label was formed in 1946. It was a major player in the bop revolution, recording many of the small-group masterpieces that Parker either would not or could not record for Lubinsky's Savoy label. In 1949 Russell, whose musical tastes were eclectic, abandoned modern jazz for modern classical music. Between 1949 and 1951, Dial was the first label to issue controversial modern works by such composers as Arnold Schoenberg, Ernst Krenek and Rudolph Kolisch.



Musicraft was founded in 1937 as a classical label, but it did poorly and eventually left the classical field. In 1944 Albert Marx, another passionate lover of the music though perhaps a bit more conservative than Lubinsky or Russell, became the label's artistic director. Under his guidance Marx signed such exemplars of the "progressive swing" style as Boyd Raeburn, RCA Victor renegade Artie Shaw, jazz singer Sarah Vaughan, and jazz pianists Teddy Wilson, Herman Chittison (a cousin of Art Tatum's who played a simplified version of the Tatum style) and singer-pianist Harry "The Hipster" Gibson. Marx, who was married to former Goodman band singer Helen Ward, did what he could to bring some of these newer sounds to the market but,

lacking some of the sales pipelines of the major labels, had a hard time despite signing such major names as Shaw, Duke Ellington and the popular novelty artist Gibson. In 1948 he formed an even more influential jazz label, Discovery Records, the first label to make significant recordings by such giants as alto saxophonist Art Pepper and pianist George Shearing.

Yet another new "major" label established itself in the wake of World War II. This was Mercury, the brainchild of Irving Green, Berle Adams and Arthur Talmadge. They were a major force in jazz and blues, classical music and country music recordings. Early in their history, Mercury opened two pressing plants, one in Chicago and the other in St. Louis, Missouri. With the use of automatic presses and providing 24-hour turnaround, they went into direct competition with major recording labels such as Columbia, Decca, Capitol and RCA Victor. By hiring two promoters, Tiny Hill and Jimmy Hilliard, they penetrated the pop market with names such as Frankie Laine, Vic Damone and Patti Page, but they also produced some excellent jazz records as well. Unfortunately, as time went on, Mercury became something of a schizophrenic label, still putting money into jazz and then classical music, but working hard to convert some of its biggest names to pop music. Perhaps the most famous case, and the most tragic musically, was Frankie Laine.

Originally discovered by legendary songwriter Hoagy Carmichael, who recommended the young unknown to Billy Berg's nightclub in Hollywood, Laine was a superb jazz and ballad singer. When Mercury originally signed him,





they allowed him to choose much of his own material; but by 1948 they had hired Mitch Miller, a former classical oboist and one of the most tasteless arrangers in the entire music business, and allowed him to control Laine and turn his scintillating jazz style into a hoky sort of pseudo-folk-music, characterized by such songs as “Mule Train” and “Cry of the Wild Goose.” Perhaps Laine would never have made the switch permanent if these records had not been such big sellers, but they were, and slowly but surely Laine lost his jazz abilities. When he recorded a “jam session” with former Basie trumpeter Buck Clayton, who adored him, in 1956, there was nothing left of the Frankie

Laine who had recorded “Shine,” “On the Sunny Side of the Street” and “That Ain’t Right” for Mercury back in the 1940s.

In one sense, though, jazz was developing too fast and in too many different directions for average listeners to absorb. Even a jazz genius such as Earl Hines, in whose band Gillespie once played, said that the modern musicians of his time moved too fast in more ways than one; and Mary Lou Williams, the great pianist-arranger of the Andy Kirk band, arrogantly dismissed bebop as “sounding like Chinese music” — an insult to the Chinese as well as the boppers. In the wake of both be-bop and the disillusion with swing, there was another stream of listeners, mostly white, who dismissed both styles but embraced the simpler, less complex music of the early New Orleans and Chicago jazz of the 1910s and ‘20s. Some of these listeners, wealthy ones, rediscovered Bunk Johnson working at a rice mill in New Iberia, Louisiana, fit him with a new set of teeth, and recorded him independently. Other listeners, themselves professional musicians, turned their backs on swing and started “traditional jazz bands” of their own. These included Chicago pianist Art Hodes and California trumpeter Lu Watters. By 1947, the three schools of jazz—progressive swing, “trad jazz” and bop—came to loggerheads. Louis Armstrong gave up his big band to form a sextet called “The All Stars” with which he would play until the end of his life. Most of the major big bands of the time, including Herman’s and Goodman’s, threw in the towel and disbanded. And a new kind of popular jazz music, an off-shoot of swing, was slowly taking root in African-American communities. This was rhythm and blues, a style created and honed by singer-altoist Louis Jordan. By the early 1950s, jazz had become an art music, which it always wanted to be; but in so doing it, like classical, had lost its core market, the average listener who thought that Sammy Kaye’s record of “Daddy” was just as hip as Nat Cole’s “Straighten Up and Fly Right,” or who preferred the “moldy fig” music of the trad-jazz revivalists better than anything new being created on the market.

In short, jazz was slowly but surely divorcing itself from popular music forms—something it had to do to survive and thrive, but not something that either thrilled or even interested the average listener who just wanted music to entertain him.

The tip of the glacier had broken off. Time would erode it completely from pop culture.

Yet before it did, modern jazz produced at least one artist who managed to bridge a few of the gaps that existed between art music and pop culture. This was Dizzy Gillespie. Unlike



his colleague Charlie Parker, whose exceptional brilliance as an improviser was compromised by his drug addiction and unreliability, Gillespie was clean, sober and dependable. He was also a tireless worker who built, rehearsed and maintained the first (and best) big bebop band of the 1940s. Fueled by a ream of brilliant arrangements by himself, Gil Fuller and newcomer George Russell, with a five-man trumpet section that could outblast Stan Kenton but do so with much greater artistry and technique, and bolstered by a rhythm section that contained the greatest conga drummer of all time, Luciano “Chano” Pozo, the Gillespie orchestra broke down barriers and fused musical elements in a way that quite simply never existed before. Even Thelonious Monk, not himself a bopper but conversant with the new style, contributed a few pieces to the band, particularly his moody theme “Round Midnight.” But the most arresting and commercial asset to the band was Gillespie himself. Dancing in a graceful-yet-goofy manner in front of his orchestra, waving and playing his trumpet with the bell bent upwards, wearing a beret with a G-clef pin on the front and sporting a goatee, and singing nonsense scat lyrics to his own tunes, Dizzy was the epitome of the late-1940s Hipster. And though there were a few challengers from white musicians, particularly Harry Gibson, this was one case where none of them got it right. Dizzy invented the image and then broke the mold. Others tried, and tried hard—even narcoleptic pop singers like Perry Como recorded tunes like “A-Hubba-Hubba-Hubba (Dig You Later),” but no one really believed that Como or his colleagues were as hip as Dizzy. Gillespie created a cult that was to find fruition, and clones, among the Beat Generation of writers, poets and musicians a decade later.

Jazz improvisations “Frozen in time”

Even from its earliest days of jazz, a jazz musician’s greatest pride was creating different improvisations on a song in every performance they gave, even if it was played twice in the same evening. But records had a deleterious effect on this process, especially among record collectors, who grew to enjoy certain improvisations over others and thus expected the musicians to play it “the same way” when they heard them in person. Thus Louis Armstrong “had” to play the same solos on “Wild Man Blues” and “West End Blues” that he had on the records *ad infinitum*; Bunny Berigan had to play “I Can’t Get Started,” especially the solo cadenzas near the end, the same way every time; and even such immensely gifted improvisers as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Art Tatum suffered this fate. Parker, for instance, was always annoyed when audiences wanted him to repeat the very poor solo he had played on his Dial recording of “Lover Man,” made when he was strung out on heroin; so annoyed, in fact, that he insisted on re-recording it for Norman Granz in 1951. And Tatum, in a 1956 interview with Willis Conover, could never understand why listeners asked him to play something the same way he had on a record he made ten or fifteen years earlier. (Fortunately Tatum, despite the extreme complexity of his solos, had total recall and so could play anything he had once played at any time, but it still annoyed him.) Even Glenn Miller, often chided by the jazz press for his “rigid” control of his soloists, usually let them play different solos in person, even on such favorites as “In the Mood,” though he did ask cornetist Bobby Hackett to play the same solo all the time on “A String of Pearls” because it fit the tune so perfectly.

This was a trend that, among other things, eventually helped kill jazz as a popular music. The less willing musicians were to repeat what they had done on records, the less willing audiences were to attend their concerts. Of course, this never really affected the true jazz aficionados, but they were always a small percentage of the listening public; and so, as jazz grew and developed, the audience for jazz began to shrink. This is one of several facets that eventually led to a decline in jazz.

Three isolated geniuses

Even the wildest and most far-out of bebop musicians, however, could not hold a candle to three men who, each in their own way, were to revolutionize jazz and bring it into an even deeper realm of art. These were pianist Lennie Tristano, bassist-composer Charles Mingus and pianist-composer Thelonious Monk. Though all three produced music that in some way conformed to the progressive swing or bop mold, none of them had their heart in bebop. They saw the form, rightly, as a transitional one, self-limiting in the rules and restrictions it put on its players, also realizing that only a dozen or so musicians could come close to the soloistic brilliance of Parker, Gillespie or the boppers' greatest pianist, Bud Powell.

Mingus actually emerged first, in 1945; but working on the West Coast, where "jazz" was equated in the public's mind with Trad Jazz or "Dixieland," he had few listeners and even fewer converts. Not that he didn't try to break through into the mainstream. During 1945-46 he led a small band called "Stars of Swing" featuring himself, tenor saxist Lucky Thompson



and his childhood friend, trombonist Britt Woodman. But like most of his projects in those years, the Stars of Swing went nowhere; in fact, they didn't even make records together. He also made a string of recordings, some interesting, some very commercial and some brilliant, for a series of small West Coast record labels that, like his fortunes, seemed to sink into oblivion just when it looked like they were taking off. It took a half-century for his collected work for Excelsior, 4-Star, Fentone, Dolphins of Hollywood and the Rex Hollywood labels to be collected onto a single album, for the simple reason that it took almost that long to track the original records down. Only now can we hear the beginnings of his compositional and conceptual brilliance as exemplified in such recordings as "Story of Love," "Inspiration," "He's Gone" and his greatest composition of the era, "Mingus Fingers," in which he combined the harmonic language of Stravinsky with the rhythms of jazz. Mingus finally came to some national attention in late 1947 when he joined the popular big band of Lionel Hampton, who played an orchestral form of rhythm-n-blues but who also admired creativity. Mingus managed to both play and record "Mingus Fingers" with Hampton's band for Decca, which gave him enough national exposure to bring him out of obscurity.

Tristano, blind since childhood, emerged in 1946. His piano style, with its classical touch and incredible harmonic complexities, was so far ahead of his time that only a handful of listeners and critics "got" him, but by 1948 he was more popular and better-known than Mingus or Monk, partly because he worked in New York and partly because he was white. Yet whereas Mingus liked to work with large groups and even orchestras, Tristano confined himself to small bands, quartets and quintets, that played experimental jazz in which the players both created and improvised entire pieces based on a pre-selected chord progression but

nothing else. This “free jazz” was the antithesis of the highly-structured bebop school, yet it, too, had an enormous impact on music of the future.

Monk, who was part of the bebop gestation at Minton’s during 1941-43—his composition “Epistrophy” was recorded in 1942 by a small group headed by Cootie Williams as “Fly Right”—actually disliked bebop, finding its rhythmic figures self-limiting. Though he continued to be associated musically with seminal figures in bop through 1953, even on records, Monk’s own style was extraordinarily angular, both rhythmically and harmonically, much like the music of Igor Stravinsky. (Critic Ralph Berton, in fact, usually referred to Monk as “the Stravinsky of jazz.”) His first exposure on records occurred in 1947 for Blue Note which, in one fell swoop, managed to shake its label of “moldy fig” associations (their previous output had concentrated on Bechet, James P. Johnson, Meade Lux Lewis, Edmond Hall, Art Hodes and Wild Bill Davison) and link itself indelibly with the jazz avant-garde. On three remarkable days in October and November of that year, Monk restructured two standards (“Nice Work if You Can Get It” and “April in Paris”) and etched such far-out originals as “Humph,” “Evonce,” “Thelonious,” “Ruby My Dear,” “Well You Needn’t,” “Off Minor,” “In Walked Bud” and his only song to break into mainstream pop listening, the haunting “Round Midnight.” Using little-known musicians, Monk created a sound-world like no other. From that day to this there have been jazz and classical critics who have denigrated Monk’s unorthodox piano technique: he did not traverse the keyboard smoothly, as was (and is) acceptable, but used infinite finely-shaded accents, stressing a note here and another there rather than playing each with the same amount of pressure. There may be, as composer-musicologist Gunther Schuller has said, very few classical admirers of Thelonious Monk’s playing, but those of us who do admire it know one thing. Incessant practice and limber fingers can eventually help you to play like Tatum or Oscar Peterson, but no amount of practice can equip you with the kind of intuitive beat-and-time fractioning that Monk could accomplish. If this is “crude” piano playing, just try to duplicate it yourself. You will find that you cannot.

Those remarkable Frenchies: Désormière, Reinhardt and Piaf

During the 1940s three remarkable French performers, all of whom had been active previously, made an enormous impact on record-buyers and listeners. They were conductor Roger Désormière, chanteuse Edith Piaf, and jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt.

Désormière, born in 1898, was the oldest. He had been conducting for decades but came to prominence via his 1941 recording of Debussy’s opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* for HMV. Featuring an authentic cast of French-speaking singers—Paul Cabanel, Leila Ben Sedira, Jacques Jansen, Armand Narcon, Irene Joachim and Emile Rousseau—the recording set a standard for performances of this work that was to last for thirty-five years, which is to say, it was cool, ethereal and other-worldly. What is interesting is that this was in direct opposition to Debussy’s written and verbal directions (carried on in the 1940s by one of his early *Mélisandes*, soprano Maggie Teyte), which was that the opera should be passionate and intense, qualities that had appealed to the young Arturo Toscanini when he premiered the work in Italy in 1907. Oddly, there had been recorded excerpts from *Pelléas* led by one of the composer’s favorite conductors, Piero Coppola, in 1929 which were closer to his original conception, and another early exponent of the work, Pierre Monteux, continued to conduct it the way the composer intended into the 1950s; but as I mentioned in the premise of this book, recorded performances have had a way of influencing live performances, especially as recording techniques improved and more complete recordings began to emerge. Désormière also left us remarkable performances of orchestral works by Ibert, Ippolitov-Ivanov, Tchaikovsky

(*Sleeping Beauty* suite) and Scarlatti-Tommasini (“The Good-Humored Ladies”) with the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire that came to define French conducting for millions of listeners. Sadly, he suffered a stroke in 1953 and spent the last decade of his life in seclusion.

Edith Piaf, France’s “little sparrow,” remains the only French pop singer to penetrate and remain an icon in English-speaking countries as much as in her native country. Despite the earlier and later influx of singers like Maurice Chevalier, Jacques Brel, and even the “Singing Nun,” Sœur Sourire, only Piaf was able to become an impenetrable, lasting icon of not only French popular singing but French pop artistry in non-French-speaking countries around the world. Perhaps it was due to her image—this short, thin, waif-like woman in the black dress, singing out to large auditoria with her surprisingly immense voice—or, more likely, it was due to the incredible charisma she projected, even on records, where her soaring, metallic voice penetrated straight to the heart regardless of the language barrier—but in any case, the songs most closely identified with her became surprising pop hits in England and America. Some of them, like “The Three Bells,” “La Vie en Rose” and “Autumn Leaves,” were actually translated into English, but many others (“La Vie, l’Amour,” “Bravo Pour le Clown,” “Milord,” “Padam Padam,” “Mon Legionnaire” and “La Belle Histoire d’Amour”) were not, yet they still grew into our culture in a way that would not be matched by any international singer thereafter.



As for Django, he was already a legend among jazz musicians by 1939, but in America the odd sound of the Quintet of the Hot Club of France—a violin, three guitars and bass, often without drums—was too “continental” and off-putting to penetrate our consciousness. Even such sensitive jazz critics as Leonard Feather denigrated his playing as being too classical and divorced from the blues tradition to be seriously considered as jazz. But when, influenced by the highly popular recordings of the Benny Goodman Sextet with Charlie Christian, Reinhardt formed a new group that included two clarinets, two guitars, bass and drums, his popularity took off in the United States. By 1942 he

had dropped from sight, and many in the jazz press thought him dead, but it turned out he was merely hiding out in Casablanca. When the allies liberated France in 1945, one of the first thing the American musicians in uniform did was seek out Reinhardt to play with them. He made V-Discs and played in radio broadcasts with the Air Transport Command Band, and also made very rare but highly-valued recordings for the tiny ABC Jazz Club label) with the jazz wing of Glenn Miller’s Army Air Force Band, their identities purposely disguised on the label. (For the record, they were trumpeter Bernie Privin, clarinetist-alto saxist Peanuts Hucko, pianist Mel Powell, bassist Joe Shulman and drummer Ray McKinley.)

After the war, however, Reinhardt went back to the “continental”-sounding type of quintet that had made his name. It was a hit in England, where this style had always been popular, but again not in America. In 1946, he finally visited America, at the invitation of Duke Ellington. Typically of Django, he arrived hatless, guitarless, and expecting all of the U.S. to fall at his feet. The musicians and jazz-lovers all gathered to see this phenomenon they had only know from records in person, but in a way they were disappointed. Unable to find an acoustic instrument he liked, Reinhardt was forced to use an electric guitar. Though he had trouble adapting to it, he spent enough time listening to other American jazz guitarists—

Tiny Grimes, Everett Barksdale and especially Oscar Moore, the great guitarist of the Nat Cle Trio whose playing was closest in technique and temperament to his own—that he became convinced that the electric guitar was the wave of the future. Back in Europe, reunited with his old bandmate Stephane Grappelli, Reinhardt continued with a “Hot Club Quintet”—but this time it included a piano, bass and drums, along with himself on electric guitar. He was modernizing his style; but this time, it was not Americans he alienated but the Europeans who, above all else, value Tradition with a capital T. To them, this new, more exciting, more modern Django wasn’t Django at all but some pale imitation trying to sound “American.” He took two years off, went fishing, came back with a new group at a Paris café, made some brilliant recordings that were again becoming noticed on the other side of the Atlantic, but then tragically died at the age of 43.

Of these three remarkable French musicians, only Piaf continued her career beyond 1953, yet all three were to have profound influences on the music of the future. And, when popular singer-songwriter Paul Simon made a record in the Hot Club Quintet style with Grappelli (“Hobo’s Blues”) for Columbia, this sound suddenly became American. You can still hear it in dozens of television ads, selling everything from diet cuisine to Internet service providers. But despite this, not to mention an international Django Reinhardt competition in France that attracts both Caucasian and Gypsy guitarists from around the world, there never was, nor never will be, another guitarist like Reinhardt.

Country music learns to swing

One of the things most people forget when they think of the “father of country music,” Jimmie Rodgers, is that Rodgers played quite often with jazz musicians. Granted, they weren’t all of the high caliber of Louis and Lil Armstrong, as on “Standing on the Corner,” but they did provide a jazz-like flavor to his music that later imitators minimalized or ignored (as on “Waiting for a Train,” “California Blues” and “My Blue-Eyed Jane”). One country performer who did not ignore this cross-cultural blending was bandleader Bob Wills, whose Texas Playboys, even from the beginning, revived or borrowed jazz tunes and textures which he mixed into his steel-guitar sound. By 1940, the Wills band was sounding very much like a standard swing band at times, for instance in one of his biggest hits, “Cherokee Maiden.” But it was in his post-war band of 1946-48 that Wills flirted the most with jazz, using such extraordinary musicians as trumpeter Alex Brashear, pianist Millard Kelso, Billy Jack Wills on bass and a remarkable guitarist, Lester “Junior” Barnard, on guitar. Barnard, who had begun his career jamming with Charlie Christian in Oklahoma City, developed a wild, highly individual style which purposely used amplifier distortion to create extraordinary solos. Wills thought the world of Barnard and used him whenever he could, but the guitarist had a restless spirit and did not enjoy being tied down to a band for long periods of time, and so he was in and out of the Wills band during the late 1940s and early ‘50s. The Wills band also used drums which, thanks to such strongly influential musicians as Roy Acuff, were banned at the Grand Ole Opry until the late 1950s. Wills refused to omit the drums from his Opry performances, and so his group was banned from performing there for many years. (The one time he did, he hid the drums behind a curtain, but as soon as the management heard them the band was quickly escorted off the stage.) Nevertheless, Wills’ recordings created a market that had not existed before, for country music with a jazz bite.

Another pioneer of the 1940s was singer-songwriter Hank Williams. Williams didn’t use drums but he, too, incorporated jazz and blues techniques into country music, which is one reason why songs like “Move It On Over” and “Jambalaya” quickly entered the popular

mainstream. Curiously, Williams was reviled by the jazz hipsters who considered his singing and playing to be hopelessly corny, but some of the jazz musicians themselves were drawn to the pungently direct emotion of his singing, particularly Charlie Parker who never missed a chance to play a Williams record on jukeboxes when he was touring but not on stage. By the year of Williams' death, 1953, his songs "Your Cheatin' Heart," "Cold, Cold Heart" and "Jambalaya" had all become pop hits covered by other artists, which led to a remarkably easy acceptance of his own versions when they were reissued in the early 1960s.

The new pseudo-classical market

Also during this period, the radio and record industry created a new pseudo-classical market. In some cases, genuine classics were rescored and reorchestrated in such a way that they could appeal more greatly to the masses; in others, pieces that were more honestly "pop" were dressed up in classical guise and sold to audiences as a form of art. Among the various perpetrators in this particular form of musical chicanery were conductors André Kostelanetz and Arthur Fiedler, whose promotion of Grofé's "Grand Canyon Suite" even persuaded Toscanini to perform it, and whose pop records of "Jalousie" and the various catchy tunes written by Leroy Anderson ("Sleigh Ride," "The Syncopated Clock," "The Typewriter" and "The Waltzing Cat") were sold on RCA's prestigious Red Seal label. Also on Red Seal were the pretentious "classical jazz" pieces played by pianist José Iturbi and the various recordings, including pop songs, Broadway tunes and "rearrangements" of genuine arias and Italian songs, by the popular tenor Mario Lanza.

Lanza was a special case in many ways. Once an aspiring legitimate tenor, it was soon discovered that he couldn't memorize a role, so he took to giving concerts with soprano Frances Yeend and baritone George London as the "Bel Canto Trio," a group that did absolutely nothing to live up to its name. But in 1948 Lanza, now a single, managed to give a concert at the Hollywood Bowl. There, his voice beefed by microphones, he was heard by Louis Mayer of M-G-M who immediately offered him a movie contract. This in turn quickly led to a record contract with RCA, where his name was marketed alongside that of Melchior, Björling and Jan Peerce. But there was one important difference. For all their use of echo chambers and microphone amplification, Melchior, Björling and Peerce could be heard on a stage without boosting. Lanza's voice was not so large, though it was beautiful. His 1951 recording of "Be My Love," a mega-million-copy seller, became widely known in the record industry as a studio marvel, his voice magically boosted to Caruso-sized proportions at crucial moments. It was such a studio tour-de-force, in fact, that Lanza, like Jan Peerce with "Bluebird of Happiness," was asked to sing the song almost every time he appeared. But Peerce *could* duplicate the sounds of his record in person; Lanza could not, and so he politely declined such invitations at concerts. On television, he would "sing" it by lip-synching the record. This marked the first, but not the last, time that a classical or crossover artist would resort to lip-synching in supposedly "live" appearances, and set a dangerous trend for the future.

The "Speed Wars"

RCA Victor, the largest producer of electronics in the 1930s and a leader in the field of research and development, owned many critical electronic patents. The company developed new vacuum tube technology which improved radio transmission and reception, and helped develop the first commercially available TV cameras and TV receiving sets. America was recovering from the effects of the great depression by the late 1930s, and RCA was forging

ahead with new state of the art electronic inventions, including a beautiful 12 inch screen console TV set demonstrated in the RCA Worlds Fair pavilion in 1939.

One of the new electronic inventions and innovations developed by RCA in the 1930s was a new disc record system. In 1938, David Sarnoff ordered his engineers to develop an entirely new disc record and automatic record changer. The only recording medium of the day was the 78-rpm record, which had many technical limitations. The 78 shellac discs were heavy, fragile, breakable, had high surface 'white' noise, limited frequency range and very limited playing time. Also, from about the time of World War II on, shellac was a premium commodity, which led to record manufacturers (including RCA) using cheaper forms of shellac, some of which had a glass or silicone base. Added to the limitations of the discs was the quality of the automatic record changers of the day, which were of a poor mechanical quality and routinely either broke the fragile 78 discs, chipped off large chunks from the outer edges or gouged out the hole in the center of the disc.

Sarnoff wanted a completely new disc record system which would “cure” or eliminate all problems associated with 78-rpm discs and auto record changers. To accomplish this, a team of RCA engineers began designing a new disc record and automatic record changer. The 45-rpm disc record was designed from the ground up, and featured entirely new innovations and improvements never before featured in a disc record. The RCA engineers developed a “crystal” phono cartridge which could track a microgroove record at only 10 or 12 grams needle pressure (then a very light tracking weight), and to protect the new vinyl disc record from abrasions or surface scratches from other records stacked above and below each other on the automatic changer spindle, the RCA engineers designed the new 45 disc having a raised center, so the discs could not contact each other during the playing cycle. Also, the RCA engineers designed the new 45 disc records to produce the least amount of distortion, by aligning the recorded tracks across the area of the disc which produced the least tone-arm tracking error (thereby reducing the amount of sound distortion). In addition, they designed the new 45 disc featuring a large center ‘hole’ to prevent the stress and damage common to the shellac 78 disc’s small center hole by a combination of the records’ weight and mechanical auto changers. The new 45-rpm discs would not suffer either surface or ‘hole’ damage, would not slip against each other while playing, would be unbreakable, would have no surface noise and would feature extended frequency range for greatly improved music quality. While the new 45 disc record technology was being developed, another team of RCA engineers was developing an entirely new automatic record changer. The automatic record changers of the day had many mechanical shortcomings – very heavy tone arm tracking weight, a tendency to jam during the reject cycle and routinely damaging the fragile 78 discs.

In 1939, the entirely new RCA Victor 45-rpm system was developed, tested and ready for production – but Sarnoff postponed its introduction because he believed the American economy had not fully recovered, so there would not be enough free money for the general public to purchase the new system (plus, the 78 disc system had been in use for 40 years and he did not want to rock the boat). And so the RCA 45-rpm system was shelved and its development and technology kept a carefully guarded industrial secret—until Columbia’s new 33½ rpm system rang the competition bells in the RCA Victor boardrooms in 1948.

The vinyl microgroove 33½ rpm ‘LP’ record was developed and first marketed by Peter Goldmark and his engineers at Columbia records in 1948. Prior to the retail release of the first LP record, Goldmark invited David Sarnoff, and his engineers to tour the Columbia record labs and view the new 33½ rpm disc and record playing system. Sarnoff accepted the invitation, and he and his chief engineers were ushered through the Columbia labs by Goldmark himself, shown the entire new microgroove record cutting lathe and record pressing sys-

tem, and treated to a sound quality demonstration of the new LP disc. The new vinyl disc was light years ahead in sound quality compared to the 78-rpm shellac record. The new 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ 'LP' records provided greatly extended frequency response of 50 to 12,000 cps (cycles per second), compared to the average 8,000 cps top frequency limit for current production 78 rpm discs – plus, the new microgroove records made of vinyl provided very low surface noise and, for the first time, quiet music passages were not drowned out by the hiss and scratch surface noise inherent in shellac 78 discs. In addition, the new vinyl records were not breakable, unlike brittle shellac 78 discs – and a 12-inch vinyl disc weighed a fraction of the weight of a comparable old fashioned 78 disc, saving the record producer, record shipper and retail record store the hassle and monetary loss from broken discs and a great savings in lowered shipping costs.

David Sarnoff and his engineers politely expressed their approval and admiration for the 'new' recording medium developed by Columbia, but following the tour and demonstration, Sarnoff exploded, ordering his engineers in marketing and research to bring into production the previously-developed 45-rpm system. RCA was able to bring their entire 45-rpm system out of mothballs and into production by early 1949. The first advertising for the new '45' system appeared in Billboard magazine in April 1949, and the first of the new 45 RPM discs and automatic record players appeared in retail record shops in June of 1949. Peter Goldmark and his Columbia engineers could not understand or believe RCA Victor could develop and bring to market an entirely new disc recording medium in only a few months – and, they did not know, for several years RCA Victor had invented and developed a ready market for both the discs and automatic record changers in 1938-39.

Thus began the infamous “speed war” between the two completely incompatible systems. Columbia’s marketing was not only simplistic and logical, but bare-bones in its approach. Their advertising simply explained the various advantages of the LP over the 78 (not exactly a difficult concept to understand) and, more importantly for post-war Americans on a budget, the lower price for the amount of music they were getting. Early Columbia



Masterworks LP covers were bare-bones as well, featuring a drawing of the top of a Doric column—white on a background of red, yellow, green or blue—with the recording information printed in large but simple black letters within the column. These dull but instantly recognizable album covers became quickly and humorously known among collectors as the “Co-

lumbia tombstone” because of its resemblance to a tomb marker. By 1950, Columbia was indulging in cover art that featured either a photo of the performer or pictures of buildings somewhat related to the album’s content.

RCA countered in some creative and some bizarre ways. One of the most interesting was to create transparent, multi-colored vinyl—green for “country” records, yellow for children’s records, blue or conventional black for pop records and, of course, red for their Red Seal. They also created new label colors never before seen on RCA discs, such as green (which soon became so popular that it was used for even pop discs through 1952) and a sort of charcoal grey for blues records (several of the old Tampa Red and Peetie Wheatstraw discs of the 1930s came out on RCA’s grey label). The bizarre aspects came from the way in which these records were used and promoted. Refusing to “give in” to the surging popularity of the 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ disc, especially for extended classical works, Sarnoff insisted that complete symphonies and even operas be issued in the new 45-rpm format. Though of course the discs were quiet and

unbreak-able, they still had to be changed every four minutes. Sarnoff tried to compensate for this bizarre arrangement by developing the “Extended Play” 45 by 1950, which could contain up to eight minutes of music, but it was a lost cause. The company finally gave in and began producing LPs by 1951 though, oddly, they continued to release complete symphonies and operas on *both* 45 and 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ -rpm formats! This kind of speed schizo-phrenia confused and alienated many record buyers, and by 1954 the classical 45s disappeared except for single arias or short pieces.

The other bizarre aspect of the new 45 was the way it was promoted. Advertising for the new system touted all its advantages—the swiftness and quietness of the record changer, its compact, light design, silent pickup, big-holed changer that stacked records without damage, the distortion-free disc surface, the raised label area that prevented discs from touching or scratching each other, the convenient 7-inch size—without ever once mentioning the speed of the record. Perhaps they felt that mentioning its incompatibility with the LP on the same player would dampen sales, but it wasn’t really until the mid-1950s that Garrard came out with the now-famous “three-way” turntable that could play all three speeds (78, 45 and 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm), accommodating the different groove widths by means of a cleverly-designed “flip-over” needle. Of course, by then the 45 had become the standard for pop and light classical singles, the LP the standard for classical music and any sort of “album,” though not only RCA but several independent labels issued Extended-Play or “EP” 45s as mini-albums.



The invention of the LP, and Columbia's generous decision not to apply for exclusive patents on its speed but only on their own label and groove designs—a clever marketing ploy, since the more LPs there were on the market, the more popular Columbia LPs would be—led to a virtual explosion of new LP labels in the early 1950s. Likewise RCA, following Columbia's lead, did not restrict others from making 45s for the same clever reason. Many of the labels that had previously existed only as 78s quickly began making both speeds, converting their old catalogs to the new formats. Capitol even had a solution for those who might have a newfangled phonograph that could play both 45 and 33½ discs, but did not have the new spindle adaptors for the larger hole: a 45 disc with a built-in spindle adaptor which could be removed by gently “pushing out” from the center if you happened to have a large-hole spindle available.

The advent of tape and television

During the late 1930s, the Germans developed two systems of recording that completely bypassed the direct-to-disc method of 78-rpm discs. One of these, messy but inexpensive, was the wire recorder. A spool of wire was run from end to end through magnetic heads that recorded sound onto it. Its two advantages were that it was inexpensive, and the recorded spools of wire were easy to carry and transport. Its two disadvantages were that the wire sometimes became twisted, creating a knot, and that it was difficult to transfer the sound thus recorded onto another recording medium such as a disc. The second was magnetic tape, developed by the German company BASF. This used a reel of thin silicone plastic stretched out and coated with magnetic particles that could transcribe sound onto the tape. Its two disadvantages were that it was more expensive than wire, and that the resultant reels, some ten to twelve inches in diameter, were bulky and had to be stored in a temperature-controlled room in order to avoid cracking, splitting or other damage. But magnetic tape was so wonderful in other ways, particularly its dynamic range which was greater than wire and its ability to have the sound recorded on it modified, even re-recorded onto another tape on which extra sounds could be added (such as additional instruments or voices), that it soon became an industry standard for recording, even before the war was over.

RCA was probably (but not definitely) the first American company to start using tape. All of Toscanini's NBC radio performances from 1942 onwards were preserved by the new medium; yet, oddly enough, for recording purposes, 78-rpm wax masters were still used, at least until 1948. Thus, all of the conductor's complete operas with NBC (Beethoven's “Fidelio,” Puccini's “La Bohème” and the five Verdi operas) were captured on magnetic tape but, because it was difficult to transfer tapes to 78s—not to mention the fact that issuing complete operas during the war and post-war years was an expensive proposition—they were not issued until the late 1940s when the first of them (“Fidelio,” “Bohème” and Verdi's “Otello”) appeared—on 45-rpm discs, of course. After 1951 these were transferred to LP, and the remaining operas came out as well.

Magnetic tape, and the wider dynamic range that both it and the LP afforded record companies, led to wonderful technological advances after World War II. American Columbia, the inventor of the LP, and British Decca, who soon followed Columbia's lead, almost immediately began using tape to make masters for their new vinyl records. Both labels even went one step further: since the 78 had not completely died out, they used the LP masters made from tape to produce 78-rpm alternates to their LP issues. One such was the Brahms First Symphony as played by the New York Philharmonic under Artur Rodzinski, and there

are many listeners who would claim that the 78-rpm version of this issue actually had more amplitude than its LP counterpart.

As for television, this is neither the time nor place to go into a detailed history of its evolution from the early 1930s onward; and besides, there are many good books and articles that chronicle its development. Suffice it to say that its relationship with art music, which was to blossom in the 1950s and '60s, got off to a fairly primitive start in 1948. One would think that Toscanini and NBC were the first American symphony telecast, but actually CBS beat them by one day. Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, by then firmly fixed in the public mind as Columbia's prize symphonic group, made their television debut on CBS the day before Toscanini's first broadcast. But, of course, the legendary name of Toscanini and the great marketing machine of RCA helped fix his concerts more firmly in the public mind than Ormandy's. The first Toscanini telecast was crudely staged and directed but the second, a wonderful performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, was far more interesting and imaginative, featuring (at one point) a close-up of the conductor's face and hands superimposed over a panoramic shot of the orchestra playing. It was a wonderful touch, quite advanced for 1948, and pointing to a way that symphonic telecasts could be made visually interesting for the general public.

Sadly, it was not to last. After Toscanini's retirement in 1954, NBC lost interest in doing other symphony concerts on TV, though that year they did broadcast the first (and, to date, the last) opera composed expressly for television, Menotti's "Amahl and the Night Visitors." By then, Americans were far more interested in seeing Milton Berle, Lucille Ball, Sid Caesar, Jackie Gleason and the Colgate Comedy Hour than anything cultural though, as we shall see, the networks valiantly carried on in one way or another throughout the 1950s and '60s.